

A Critique of Selected Instructional Strategies in Higher Institutions in Nigeria

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Abstract

Teaching is the heart of education. It involves the use of myriad of teaching methods, strategies and techniques. This paper critiques some of the instructional strategies used in higher institutions in Nigeria. Two of these instructional strategies (team teaching and questioning strategy) were identified. The ‘what’ ‘how’, ‘when’ and ‘why’ of these strategies and the report of observations of lecturers at work in University of Ibadan were x-rayed. More importantly, the paper recommends that lecturers in faculties other than faculty of education should be exposed to workshop on teaching methodology and effective use of instructional strategies, adequate wait-time should be given while asking question, adoption of team teaching in various departments/faculties, among others.

Keywords: Critique, Instructional Strategies, Higher Institutions, Nigeria.

Introduction

The essence of teaching is learning. And for learning to take place, there must be effective communication between the teacher and the learners. Little wonder (Izuagba, 2012; Obioma, 2013) opines that communication is the heart of teaching while teaching, it is argued, is the heart of education. Teaching according to Oladosu (2004) is defined as an activity aimed at bringing about meaningful learning through a method that is morally and pedagogical acceptable. It involves the teacher, learner, content in form of knowledge, facts, information and skills to be imparted; a deliberate intention on the part of the learner to learn; and finally a method that respects the learners’ cognitive integrity and freedom of choice.

In a philosophical analysis of teaching, Akinpelu in Sangoleye, (2011) opines that teaching can be referred to as; an occupation or profession, an enterprise and the very act of teaching. He continued further that for any activity to be regarded as teaching, it must satisfy five criteria namely:

- (i) A person is consciously and deliberately doing the act -teacher.
- (ii) Somebody is being taught –the learner.
- (iii) Something is being taught – the subject matter.
- (iv) There is at least an intention on teacher’s part that learning takes place.
- (v) It must involve methods or procedures that are morally and pedagogically sound and acceptable.

In other words, teaching can be defined as a combination of interrelated activities (explaining, questioning, illustrating, instructing) designed by the teacher, using resources that are drawn from learners’ experiential background so as to enable the learner to concretize knowledge. In fact, a critical examination of the existing instructional strategies in higher institutions in Nigeria reveals a catalogue of strategies employed in the teaching- learning process. This ranges from traditional lecture method to constructivist approach to teaching and learning such as jigsaw strategy, concept mapping, brainstorming. In literature, some educational scholars have categorized instructional strategies into three approaches while others argued that there are only two approaches.

At the inception of organised teaching, the approaches to teaching were rooted in philosophical theories, principles and traditions. These theories emphasise the purity of knowledge, the logic and highly structured nature of organised disciplines that hinders inter- relationship between disciplines .The teachers were seen as the font of knowledge whose role is to transfer the received knowledge to passive learners who have assumed to be blank slates (Izuagba, 2012). However, with the growth in civilization, access to the internet through information communication technology, new approach to teaching emerged which accorded the learner a central position in the classroom while teachers now act as mediator and facilitator of learning. The classification of approaches to teaching according to Anyanwu, Izuagba, Obiefuna and Afurobi (2009) are:

- i. the teacher- centred approach
- ii the learner –centred approach
- iii the mastery approach.

However, most scholars like Ramsden, and Anyanwu, in Izuagba (2012) argued that there are only two approaches and that the mastery approach can be categorized as learner- centred approach. Efebo (1999) asserts that there are two classifications and they are; the conventional approach and the mastery approach. Thus the scholar would rather argue that for any classification of the instructional strategies either into teacher-centred or leaner-centred or mastery approach, what should be the principal determinant is who takes the central position /role in the teaching learning process. If the teacher is at the centre, determining the A-Z (everything) that happens in the classroom situation while learners are at the receiving end, then, such is classified as teacher-

centred. On the other hand, if the learner is seen as the centre of the teaching- learning situation while teacher performs the role of a mediator /facilitator of learning, then, the approach is learner centred. In the light of this, one can conclude that the teaching methods can be classified as: conventional approach and learner –centred /mastery approach.

What are Instructional Strategies?

Instructional strategies are techniques teachers use to help students become independent strategic learners. These strategies become learning strategies when students independently select the appropriate ones and use them effectively to accomplish tasks. Instructional strategies can: motivate students and help them focus attention, organize information for understanding and remembering, monitor and assess learning. Effective instructional strategies can be used across grades levels and subject areas and can accommodate a range of student differences (Alberta, 2002).

Encyclopedia of education (2002) opined that the instructional strategies teachers use help shape learning environment and represent professional conceptions of learning and of the learner. Some strategies consider students as empty vessels to be filled under the firm direction of the teacher; other strategies regard them as active participants learning through dialogue and interaction with others. In other words, instructional strategies can be regarded as means or series of techniques, a teacher uses in order to engage learners actively in the teaching learning process. They (instructional strategies) are used to meet varieties of developmental needs of learners under the instruction so as to achieve the desired learning outcomes. Simply, instructional strategies are techniques of instruction delivery teacher utilizes to enable him arouse and sustain the interest of the learners which invariably enable them make creative input in teaching-learning process. Examples of instructional strategies used in higher institutions are questioning strategy, team teaching, assignment and presentation, independent study, cooperative learning, among others.

Whatever the teaching method a teacher uses, it is obvious that the application of various instructional strategies in such teaching-learning process is indispensable. In the context of this discourse, emphasis is laid on two instructional strategies (team teaching and questioning strategies) among others being employed in higher institutions in Nigeria. The paper, therefore, criticizes the application of these instructional strategies with the view to finding out whether or not these strategies are effectively utilized and the extent to which their utilization enhanced effective teaching learning process.

In fact, there are many methods of teaching such as lecture method, discussion method, concept mapping, among others. However, in the context of this discourse, emphasis is placed on two instructional strategies among other strategies being employed in higher institutions in Nigeria. They are:

1. Team teaching and
2. Questioning strategy

Team Teaching

Team teaching is one of the innovative strategies employed in teaching / learning process in order to improve learning. Unlike the traditional lecture method or one teacher/ one class set up, team teaching is a strategy in which two or more teachers share the responsibility of teaching a class, a course. Olorundare (2001) asserts that team teaching is a systematic arrangement in which several teachers with a leader and with or without assistants cooperatively instruct a group of students with/without an optimum use of technology. In this practice, the size of students' groups and procedures are usually varied so as to provide optimum instruction while each teacher makes the best use of their respective competencies for the benefit of the students.

Efebo in Izuagba (2012) opines that the main rationale for team teaching is based on the idea that each teacher has his /her own area of specialization or preference with reference to the subject matter and that teaching ability varies. Moreover, when teachers teach in team, learners get the best in terms of quality instruction, variety of methods and materials. Teachers involved equally gain new insights in the subject when they compare notes, rub mind with other members of the team and observe their colleagues teach. Thus, one can say that team teaching brings about optimum utilization of the teaching staff, better preparation on the part of members of the team and improved learning outcomes.

Broadly speaking, team teaching is an approach in which two or more teachers share the responsibility of teaching a large group of students through cooperative planning, putting the plan into effect and evaluating its effectiveness. It is based on the idea that each teacher has his own area of specialization, preference or strength with reference to the subject matter/ content, teaching ability or techniques.

According to Olorundare (2001) a view of the different variations of team teaching as practised in the U.S.A. and Europe reveals the following common features:

1. The team consists of two or more teachers.
2. Large group of 150 or more students are taught at the same time. Sometimes several sections, streams or aims at a particular class level are combined into one big group.

3. The team leader is usually most qualified or most experienced member of the team.
4. Various instructional materials and devices are extensively used, especially those which are suitable for large group presentations.
5. Other non- professional personnel to do clerical as well as other routine jobs such as checking attendance, collecting and distributing materials, marking examination scripts and the like are hired as members of the team . Most often, student – teachers are utilized for this purpose.

Team teaching can be organised on the basis of the same subject, or on specific techniques or methods to be used. And it is advantageous on the following grounds:

1. It provides an opportunity for teachers to work on a common goal through close association and cooperative planning.
2. The expertise or specialized skills of teacher can be used to benefit more students.
3. Members of the team learn from one another. They have the chance to observe experts or specialists perform at their best and hence, they are encouraged to do better work.
4. Teachers are allowed to develop further or master their own specialization, whether in content or in technique. Each can utilize his or her own strength to advantage and avoid embarrassment in weaknesses.
5. Because instruction is the product of the cooperative efforts of a team of teachers [experts] working together on a common task towards a common goal, the quality of instruction is generally improved.
6. It allows team members to make reasonable inputs that contribute to others' skill development.
7. Economical and efficient use of school staff, A team of three instead of six, for example could take charge of a group of, say two hundred and fifty (250) students so that the budget for hiring three more regular teachers could be used to employ non- professional assistants/ aids. Thus, students are made to benefit from contact with different teachers of different points of view and different personalities (Olorundare, 2001 and Izuagba 2012).
8. It brings about objectivity and fairness in grading. This is because students are free to choose any number of required questions in the examination not minding who taught the area.

Despite the numerous advantages of team teaching, a visit to most higher institutions in Nigeria reveals that team teaching can be criticized on the following grounds:

1. Teacher – related factor: Most teachers that employ team teaching strategy in our higher institutions demonstrate inadequate knowledge of the concept. They neither plan together nor instruct and evaluate the students together. Some lecturers would even be absent from lecture without any cogent reasons for such most especially when the team leader is weak and incapable to man the team. Also, not all teachers can work cooperatively as a team. Some teachers may want to dominate others while others may not accept such, some may be hardworking while others are not and the latter may equally see the former as a threat and this could lead to conflict in the team. Hence, the advantage of better staff utilization for students benefit is jeopardized. Little wonder Olorundare (2001) asserts that one of the most serious problems that may hinder successful operation of the team teaching is the problem of staff relationship.
2. Student – related factor: Usually, team teaching involves relatively large number of students from 100/150 to over 300 students. This large number may make the relationship among the students to be too distant and some of them may feel restless and insecure. Likewise, frequent change of teachers may also affect the students as they may not know who to relate to and identify with for them to feel confident. This usually happens when some teachers in the team teaching demonstrate superiority or prove to be more efficient than others.
3. Economic related issues: It is true that team teaching enhances better utilization of staff and brings about economy in terms of staff employment. If less number of teachers are employed due to the use of team teaching in our institutions, the resultant consequence would be unemployment of great number of trained teachers that graduate every year in our teacher education institutions. The effects of which may spell doom to the society than the advantage derived from the method.
4. Facility problem: Team teaching requires some facilities especially those needed for large group presentation, large classes, study rooms for individual studies, modern teaching technologies (ICT facilities) most of these facilities are either lacking or inadequate in our higher institutions due to poor funding of education in Nigeria.

5. Leadership – Related factor: The effectiveness of team teaching strategy depends to a great extent on the quality of the team leader. If the team leader is power conscious and power corrupt, and thinks that the team members are his/her boys/girls things may fall apart. If he is too democratic, the lazy ones may take advantage of such. Also, if no benefit is attached to leadership role, only a few would be interested in taking the mantle of leadership.

Questioning strategy

This is one of the most popular means of communication in teaching process popularized by a Greek philosopher Socrates. Questioning techniques are heavily used, and thus widely researched teaching strategy. Research indicates that asking questions is second only to lecturing (Gaither, 2008). Teachers typically spend about 35 to 50 percent of their instruction time asking questions. The ability to use apt questions makes teaching and learning very effective, interesting and lively (Izuagba, Anyanwu, Obiefuna and Afurobi, 2009). In fact, questioning strategy helps the teacher find out what learners know in order to determine where to start the lesson, arouse learner's curiosity, stimulate discussion, encourage active participation, determine learners' strengths and weaknesses, consolidate knowledge among others.

Effective questioning in classroom requires advance preparation. Questions raised may be lower-level or higher-level questions depending on the reasons for asking such questions. Lower-level questions are most appropriate for evaluating students' preparation and comprehension, diagnosing students' strengths and weaknesses and reviewing and/or summarizing content. On the other hand, higher level questions are most appropriate for encouraging students to think more deeply and critically, encouraging discussions and stimulating students to seek information on their own (Centre for Innovation in Teaching and Learning, 2013). But the fundamental questions are what type of questions can a teacher use, how, when and why should he/she use such questions?

Questions type can be lower level, higher level, divergent or probing question. Questions can be asked at any stage of teaching as much as it would enhance effective teaching and learning. For instance, a teacher can use questioning strategy at the beginning of the lesson to determine what the learners already know and establish a link between learners' related experiences and the new concept to be taught. It can be used to arouse students' interest, review previously taught concepts or to stimulate discussion. As the teaching progresses, questioning strategy can also be used to monitor the progress of the class, as stimulus variations, or to clarify misconception while at the end of the class, questions can be raised to evaluate whether or not the intended learning outcomes are achieved. Questioning strategy is used to actively involve students in the lesson, increase motivation and interest, evaluate students preparation, develop critical thinking skills, assess achievement, among others (Gaither, 2008).

Observation Report

In the course of observing lecturers at work, various departments/faculties of the University of Ibadan were visited. In **Law of Evidence** class, the lecturer lectured the undergraduate students using examples and illustrations and questioning technique with particular reference to his client. The class was interactive and a sign language expert was also involved to meet the need of a hearing – impaired student. A **visit to Psychology class in the Faculty of Social Sciences** reveals adequate combination of set-induction and questioning strategy at the beginning of the lesson. This arouses learners' curiosity to learn. All through the lesson, questions were asked in a logical manner and this made the teaching-learning process fun. The lecturer identified his students by name (Ore-Oluwa, Jenifer, Olamide, among others) while students' questions were answered with relevant and familiar examples. Though attendance was taken, few students came late but the lecturer was indifferent about it.

Also, in two **Zoology classes** observed, one is laboratory teaching where an organism was presented to the students to draw while laboratory instructors moved round to see what the students were doing. The other class is a general course for year one students. In fact, the lecture hall 'housed' over five hundred students. The technical assistant put on the electronic devices needed for power point presentation of the lesson with public address system due to large class. However, it is interesting to know that the lesson was delivered purely with lecture method. No technique/strategy was employed for the lecturer maintained a particular position on the podium throughout the one hour lecture. No room for interaction between the lecturer and the students. In fact, there may not be meaningful learning in such situation.

In **Agricultural Science class** (ANS, 210), it is worthy of note to state that team teaching was employed. The lecturer commenced the teaching by reviewing previously taught concepts using questioning strategy and relevant illustrations/examples of staple food. The lecturer took attendance while late comers were identified and disciplined. Also, the lecturer was vigilant even to identify a student that was playing with her cell phone. In this class, the lecturer attempted students to answer their questions by using prompt through reminder of pertinent previously learned concepts. This made students to search for answers for their own questions instead of relying on the teacher. The risk of this technique is that the process can be embarrassing or threatening

that the students will be intimated to ask question in the future. However, chorus answer was accepted in the class.

Moreover, the History class observed revealed the logical use of questioning strategy in reviewing the previous concepts taught that were related to the day's lesson – State Formation and Empire Building, (1500-1800). **The General Studies class observed in Faculty of Arts** showed similar thing. A poem was read and students were asked to identify figure of speech used by the poet. However, the lecturer was found of mannerism.

In Chemistry class, it is interesting to know that students passed positive comments on the lecturer, who came late to the class about ten minutes behind schedule. Many said: "It is unlike him, course representative, go and find out perhaps he is in a meeting." During the lesson, diagrammatic illustrations and examples, questioning strategy and class exercise (i.e. a problem to solve in the class) were strategies the lecturer used in teaching. In fact, at various stages of the lesson, questions were asked and appropriate reinforcements were given. Attendance was taken and students that came late were asked to give reason for coming late. They complained of being released late from Anatomy class. This could affect learning as some of them joined the class half way. When a problem was given to the students, the lecturer went round and gave the required guide to the student while working on the problem.

One interesting thing to learn from this department is the use of team teaching. According to the Head of Department, each course is handled by three or four lecturers and that the class I observed is handled by four lecturers. An interaction with another lecturer in the department revealed that the department adopted team teaching to ensure fairness, objectivity in scoring students and to prevent a lecturer from 'lording' himself over a student. In other words, team teaching avails the students the opportunity of interacting with more than one lecturer in a course. The students are free to answer any question they want and they may not know who actually assesses them among a team of lecturers. On staff related problem, the lecturer said the department has not recorded any form of conflict of interest among staff of the department.

The Economics class observed revealed a different thing in the use of questioning strategy. The lecturer started the class by reviewing the last topic taught before he presents the day's lesson. As the lesson progresses the lecturer usually asks: "is that clear or are you with me?" However, students did not response while their facial expression shows that they were lost. At another point, the lecturer asked a question and he himself answered the question. In fact, no wait-time was given to the students. This should be discouraged while using questioning technique.

In Electrical Engineering class, diagrammatic illustration, examples, questioning technique and class exercise were used by the lecturer to make teaching-learning process interesting. The presentation of fact was logical and students were carried along in the teaching-learning process. Though the concept taught (auto correlation and cross correlation) seems to be abstract and difficult, the lecturer was able to simplify the concept with examples within the reach of the students. This is, however, different from what happened in **Mechanical Engineering class**. The lecturer was busy talking to the board. Students in the front seat were carried along while others were busy doing something else. In fact, students entered and left the hall at will.

Physiology Department of the Faculty of Medicine was also observed. In teaching physiology of pregnancy, the lecturer started the class by asking this question: "what is pregnancy?" Waited for few seconds and called the class representative to response. The presentation was logical, interactive, lively and very interesting for there was a flow of information from the lecturer to the students and vice versa. The lesson was characterized with higher order and probing questions and the use of these questions at every stage of the teaching made the class lively and interesting. Not only that, relevant and real life examples were used. However, the lecturer used the word understand often and this constitutes mannerism that should be avoided.

In Pharmacy class, (Medicinal Plants and Traditional Medicine) observed, questioning strategy was equally predominant all through the teaching. The lecturer demonstrated a good way of asking question: "what do you understand by hydrotherapy"? This brought interaction between the lecturer and the students. **In all the classes observed**, it was realized that questioning strategy among others was predominant, attendance was taken (except one class),some lecturers did not give adequate wait-time for students to reflect before responding to questions, some questions were not satisfactorily answered before another question was entertained while team teaching was practised in Chemistry and Agricultural Science departments.

Conclusion

It should be noted that there are many instructional strategies used in higher institutions in Nigeria. And a combination of two or more strategies in teaching –learning situation would enhance effective teaching and learning. Also, it is revealed that questioning strategy is mostly utilized among lecturers while few departments teach as a team. However, in making choice of instructional strategy, the teacher should consider among other things: the nature of the learners to be taught, the nature of the subject/topic to be taught, the behavioural objectives to be achieved ,availability/non availability of learning resources, time available for the lesson, the class size (small, large, heterogeneous).

Based on the observation above and in view of the fact that there are varieties of ways by which lecturers ask and respond to students' questions, it is therefore, recommended that:

1. Lecturers in other faculties other than faculty of education should be exposed to teaching methodologies and instructional strategies through workshops/ seminar.
2. Departments in the University should incorporate team teaching in handling their courses.
3. Students should be released on time for another lecture most especially when the next lecture is outside the department/faculty
4. Students' involvement in lecturers' assessment in terms of lecturers' punctuality and regularity to class, audibility of voice among others should be incorporated as part of yardstick for lecturers' promotion
5. For team teaching to be effective:
 - i. There must be common planning time agreed upon by members of the team with respect to course content, procedure and course evaluation.
 - ii. A careful planned programme of evaluation of both teaching and learning must be executed.
 - iii. Schedule arrangements must be devised to make it possible to assemble appropriate students group to carry out the purpose of instruction (Olorundare 2001)
 - iv. Team members should forget their personal ego and be focused on the purpose for which the team is organised. They should be ready to tolerate and learn from one another.
 - v. There must be adequate funding of the school so as to provide adequate lecture rooms, public address system, large wall chart, large white board, interactive board, among others needed in an organised team teaching.
6. In applying questioning strategy, teachers should:
 - i. Be brief and precise with vocabulary that is within the reach of the students.
 - ii. Phrase the questions clearly before calling students' name.
 - iii. Recast the question if students are not forthcoming with responses.
 - iv. Give adequate wait-time for the students to reflect before responding.
 - v. Avoid Yes/No questions to prevent guessing.
 - vi. Give immediate feedback.
 - vii. Avoid chorus answers.
 - viii. Use more of thought- provoking questions.
 - viii. Summarize periodically.
7. Also, in responding to students' questions, teachers should:
 - i. Answer the question herself/himself most especially when little time remains for the lesson.
 - ii. Redirect the question to the class. This will enhance student-to-student interaction instead of total dependence on the teacher for answers.
 - iii. Try the student to answer his/her question before directing it to other students. This may require prompting through reminders of pertinent information/Previously learned concepts.
 - iv. Ask the students to discuss the question after the class
 - v. Refer students to relevant resources/materials where they can get additional information

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